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THE RELATION OF ORIENTAL IMMIGRATION TO THE GENERAL IMMIGRATION PROBLEM

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No part of the United States would be benefited more by a wise and satisfactory solution of the immigration problem than the Pacific Coast. Owing to its geographical position, its future growth and prosperity will depend largely upon the maintenance of friendly relations of the countries of the Orient. Moreover, the recent acquisition of the Philippine Islands has brought us into direct contact with the nations of the Far East and awakened their interest in, and directed their attention to, all matters affecting their relations to the United States. The recent industrial transformation of Japan and the successful assertion of her right to rank as a world power is enough to convince the most skeptical that the Orient is destined to play no unimportant part in the political and economic life of the future. The Western World has intruded upon the seclusion of the Chinese Empire, and its vast population is being awakened to the necessity of introducing the industrial civilization of the Occident. The full effects of this impending change in a country so densely populated and possessing natural resources so rich and varied, it may be difficult to foresee; but, that it will react in an important way upon the political and economic interests of the Western World, is beyond question.

It is highly important, not only to the Pacific Coast states, but to the entire country, that in our policy regarding immigration, we should avoid as far as possible all appearance of discrimination against Oriental nations. There is no doubt, however, that ample justification exists for the feeling prevalent on the Pacific Coast that Oriental immigration is highly undesirable. But if this end can be attained without legislation specially directed against Oriental races, the advantages of such a course are obvious. The time is approaching when Oriental nations will expect and should be accorded much the same treatment at our hands as the heretofore more favored nations of the Western World. We can hardly hope to maintain a policy of exclusion with reference to China and Japan and at the same time freely admit the immigrants of other races. A discrimination such as this, even if it did not eventually lead to political complications, might seriously inter-

fere with the development of our trans-Pacific trade. If we discriminate against the Asiatic nations in our immigration laws, we should expect, when the opportunity presents itself, to be paid back in kind. The Chinese boycott of 1905, against American goods, is some indication of the difficulties in which the continuance of this policy would probably involve us. A tenable policy—one which would not be a source of constant irritation in our foreign relations—should, in so far as possible, treat all nations alike.

But whatever may be said of the method by which we have sought to exclude Orientals, the desirability of keeping such immigration within narrow limits can hardly be questioned. This conclusion does not necessarily imply a belief on our part that the Oriental races are inferior to our own, but that they are fundamentally different, and if they were admitted in considerable numbers, it would mean a race problem of serious import. Our experience with Oriental immigration in California and Washington has been sufficient to show us that it is not the part of wisdom to pursue a policy which makes it possible for Orientals to come into this country and engage in occupations which bring them into direct competition with our own laboring population.

Our original policy, if indeed we had any distinct policy respecting immigration, was of the *laissez faire* type. Some moral encouragement was given to immigration through the humanitarian purpose to make this country a refuge for the unfortunate and the oppressed of all nations. But this sympathy for the foreigner who was seeking to better his condition, was powerfully reinforced by the self-interest of the employing classes who wanted an abundant supply of labor. The free spontaneous movement of labor to a land of larger opportunity was thus greatly accelerated through the organized effort of employers and steamship companies to make immigration a source of direct profit. The artificial stimulus thus given to immigration greatly increased the supply of unskilled labor, bringing to this country large numbers of low grade immigrants who lacked the initiative, the energy, and the means which would have made it possible for them to come before the days of cheap ocean transportation and the exploitation of immigration as a regular organized business by the great steamship companies. While something can be said in favor of a liberal attitude toward purely voluntary immigration, nothing can be urged in defense of this active encouragement of immigration for the sake of the profits which it will

bring to steamship companies and to American employers. As a partial remedy for this evil, the federal government enacted the contract labor legislation which attempted with limited success to prevent American employers from bringing in foreign laborers.

Our immigrants have heretofore come almost entirely from and still are mainly from European countries. But with the settlement of the Pacific Coast and the industrial awakening of the Orient, a new phase of the immigration problem was presented. The appearance of the Chinese coolie, with his low standard of living and his patient endurance, was an undeniable menace to the well-being of the American laborer. The same might be said, however, with reference to a good deal of the immigration even then coming into the United States through the ports of the Atlantic coast. Nevertheless, Chinese immigration was dealt with as a distinct problem, doubtless for the practical reason that any attempt to treat it as merely part of the larger problem of the general exclusion of undesirable immigrants would have made such restriction difficult if not impossible.

Still more recently the influx of Japanese awakened renewed interest in and caused more or less apprehension, especially on the part of American wage earners, as to the possibility of effective Oriental competition in the American labor market. Against this new danger, our immigration laws furnished no protection, nor would the enactment of more special legislation modeled after the Chinese exclusion acts be a satisfactory or expedient way of meeting this new difficulty. Sooner or later, we may be compelled to recognize the necessity of adopting a policy that will practically exclude immigration from all Oriental countries. But if this could be accomplished without special legislation, it would have the distinct advantage that it would avoid all appearance of discrimination against the Asiatic races and thus aid in the maintenance of friendly relations with the trans-Pacific nations.

America has been heralded all over the world as a country of high wages and abounding opportunity—a land where even the poorest classes are encouraged in the economic struggle by the prospect of bettering their condition. Whether it is to remain such much longer, will depend on our attitude toward immigration. Soon we must ask ourselves what the effects of our existing immigration policy are likely to be, and whether these are what we as a nation desire. If our present policy of admitting freely the

laboring classes of other countries is to be continued, we must expect the wage earning class here to lose any economic advantage which it may now have over the wage earners of other countries.

The immigration question, affecting as it does many diverse interests, presents a political problem for which it is no easy matter to find an acceptable solution. But, while the attitude of some classes toward immigration has been and doubtless will continue to be determined largely by considerations more or less selfish, this is not true of the nation as a whole. It is but reasonable to believe that in this matter, as in all others that vitally concern the welfare of the American people, the final solution must be in harmony with the generally accepted view of the spirit and purpose of our institutions. This, it seems, is the standard of judgment by which our immigration policy is to be approved or condemned. No policy with reference to immigration or any other matter is likely to be continued when it comes to be generally recognized that it is in conflict with the fundamental aim of our national life. Have we, as a nation, any great purpose in view, any ideal toward which we have been and are striving? What is it that we, as Americans, believe to be the distinctive feature of our civilization and wish to see perpetuated? To this question there can be but one answer. In the thought of the people generally, America has been associated with opportunity. It has been distinguished from other countries by the general diffusion and high level of well-being, the preservation of which has been, in the opinion of the people, the main object of our institutions. A prevalent belief, such as this, is a valuable national asset. It should not be jeopardized by the continuance of any policy which must inevitably have the effect of weakening the foundation upon which it rests. This, however, is just what our practically unrestricted immigration, if continued, must mean. It is obvious that the desire to enjoy the greater opportunities which this country affords is the cause of immigration, and it is equally obvious that if this immigration is allowed to continue, our advantage in this respect must disappear.

This is a question, however, which should not be settled on purely selfish grounds. While the first duty of the government is to protect its own citizens, we are under some obligation to the world at large. But the service which we can and ought to render to the people of other nations is not inconsistent with the maintenance of a high standard of living at home, even though this

may involve effective restrictions on immigration. If America is to exert a potent influence for good, if she is to elevate the standard of citizenship in other countries as well as in our own, she must guarantee to the masses of her citizens a measure of well-being that will serve as an example and a model for the more progressive nations of the world.

Moreover, our practice in the matter of immigration is directly opposed to the protective tariff policy to which we, as a nation, have long been committed. The professed, and no doubt sincere, belief of a large portion of the American people that it is the duty of the government to maintain such conditions as will ensure high wages and a high standard of living for the wage earner, has been made the chief support of our high protective tariff policy. But while maintaining protection ostensibly for the purpose of enabling American employers to pay high wages, we have freely admitted foreigners, who come in to compete for employment with American labor. We exclude foreign goods on the ground that such indirect competition of cheap foreign labor is a menace to the high standard of living of American workingmen, and at the same time, by permitting indiscriminate immigration, are defeating the end which we profess to have in view. If we really wish to safeguard the wages and the standard of living of the American workingman, the obvious, direct, and only effective way to accomplish it is to exclude all really undesirable immigrants.

It would be difficult to find any justification for a policy which attempts to exclude foreign goods or limit their importation on the ground that they are produced by cheap labor, and which at the same time permits the free importation of the laborer, whose competition is conceded to be undesirable. Inasmuch as our scheme of protection has, as its avowed object, the maintenance of high wages and general well-being for American wage earners, it would seem that our immigration laws should be revised and made to conform to this policy. In whatever light we may view it, the doctrine of protection is irreconcilably opposed to the policy of unrestricted immigration. One embodies the belief that it is the duty of this country to protect and preserve opportunity by restricting the right of foreigners to sell goods in our markets; the other, which in appearance is a concession to the humanitarian idea that American opportunity should be open to the citizens of other countries, is in effect the application of the free trade principle to the domestic labor market. If protection is to be maintained as

our national policy, its principle should be fully recognized and embodied in our immigration laws.

Looking at this matter from the standpoint of the American laboring man, no one is a desirable immigrant, who, by reason of his lower standard of living, would be willing to work for less than the prevailing rate of wages. The importation of this cheap labor is far more harmful to the laboring man and to the country at large than the importation of goods which cheap foreign labor has produced. The continuance of practically unrestricted immigration means that we must face the possibility of having reproduced here the foreign wage conditions, which, according to our theory of protection, it is desirable to exclude. That this is a real danger is sufficiently shown by the fact that in many occupations the foreign workers, with lower standards of living, have already supplanted American laborers. It cannot be said that we are any longer in need of the kind of labor which immigration chiefly supplies. The occupations which require little or no skill are already overcrowded and the continuance of immigration of this sort, by intensifying the competition for employment, must make it more difficult to maintain the American standard of wages.

Just how we should apply the remedy which the situation demands, it may be difficult to determine. Probably no one simple test would be sufficient to exclude all immigrants who are really undesirable, and no combination of tests would be adequate that did not shut out a large proportion of the immigrants who are now admitted. This may be a radical departure from our present policy, but it seems to be the only means by which it is possible to protect the standard of living of the American workingman. Such a policy, if consistently applied, would do much to relieve the strain to which unrestricted immigration is now subjecting American institutions.